



Fuels Reduction Program Southeastern Massachusetts 2005

Southeastern Massachusetts is a densely populated area with numerous wildland areas containing highly flammable species such as pitch pine and scrub oak. Many of the plant communities are fire dependent. These areas range in size from 250 to 15,000 acres and are surrounded by expanding residential development, creating a high-risk wildland-



Prescribed fire on Martha's Vineyard. Photo courtesy Massachusetts DCR

urban interface. This area is also the most rapidly urbanizing section of Massachusetts – people enjoy the amenities that the region's forests provide: they are home to rare plants, animals, and natural

communities. The forested areas also protect and provide recharge to drinking water aquifers for the

region. The varied values and uses of the open space in southeastern Massachusetts coupled with the high-risk wildland-urban interface create a significant need for an effective fire management program.

Using National Fire Plan funding, in partnership with the University of Massachusetts, the National Park Service, the Massachusetts Army National Guard, The Nature Conservancy, and local fire departments, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation has implemented a fire management program to reduce hazardous fuels, protect urban development and rare species habitat, and educate the public. Since 2003, the Massachusetts DCR and partners have used prescribed fire to treat more than 800 acres of forest fuels on both public and private land to reduce flammability and increase defensible space, and to create or rehabilitate 102 miles of perimeter firebreaks and interior safety zones of varying width.

The project is helping people in the wildland-urban interface of southeastern Massachusetts understand ecosystem-based fire hazard mitigation issues and how to reduce the risk of wildfires. The project instituted the Firewise program in the region. This project has benefited 16 communities designated as at risk from wildfire over a six-county area.

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